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Office Hours: T, 4-5:30pm; Th, 4-5:30pm

## Nature in Popular Culture

ENVS 410/510  
T/Th 2-3:50pm  
Spring 2015

This course examines the various ways that nature is represented in U.S. popular culture. What can advertisements, films, television, and popular music teach us about the ways we imagine nature and the environment? What ideas about nature are conveyed by zoos, aquariums, and nature-oriented theme parks? Popular culture representations of nature also tell us more than how we imagine nature and the environment. They articulate and naturalize ideas about race, gender, sexuality, and disability. They present certain kinds of identities as natural and normative and other kinds of identities as unnatural or out of place in nature. We will examine the politics of identity in depictions of SeaWorld, gay penguins, and Mother Earth. What is at stake in movies like *Pocahontas* or *Avatar*? How are ideas about race and colonialism communicated in advertisements for the Discovery Channel and The Body Shop? We will explore the ways that representations of nature can at times justify existing relationships of power and privilege in society and the ways in which such representations may also at times contest those existing relationships of power and privilege.

As part of this class, you will be responsible for contributing examples of popular culture to class discussion through your portfolio assignments. One of the aims of this class is to help you be a more critically and engaged reader of the popular culture that surrounds you.

### **Learning Objectives**

- Provide a working definition of popular culture and an explanation of what we gain from studying popular culture representations of nature and the environment.
- Analyze the depictions of nature and the environment in television shows, films, advertisements, and other popular culture texts.
- Describe and provide examples of the way ideas about race, gender, ability, and sexuality are communicated and contested through depictions of nature and the environment.
- Communicate effectively through written and oral communication.

### **Required Texts**

Noel Sturgeon, *Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of the Natural* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009).

\*All other readings are available in the course reader.

## Course Policies

**Preferred First Name:** The University of Oregon has a preferred first name policy. According to this policy, a student or employee's preferred first name will be used in university communications and reporting except where the use of the legal name is required for university purposes. If you have reason to believe your preferred first name may not be listed correctly in the roster or you do not feel comfortable taking advantage of UO's preferred first name policy, please communicate to me the name you wish to use. The preferred first name policy can be accessed here: <http://policies.uoregon.edu/node/216>

**Accessible Education:** The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if aspects of the instruction or course design result in barriers to your participation. Students are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center (AEC) 541-346-1155; <http://aec.uoregon.edu/>). AEC helps provide services including sign language interpreting, computer-based note-taking, classroom relocation, exam modifications, and alternative text conversion. Please request that the Accessible Education Center send me a letter outlining your approved accommodations.

**Late Work:** All work is to be handed in on time. Late work will not receive full credit.

**Academic Integrity:** Students are expected to adhere to the University of Oregon's standards of academic integrity. All work should be your own, and all sources should be appropriately acknowledged. Violations of academic integrity include plagiarism, duplicate submission, cheating on examinations, and false citations. Please do not hesitate to speak to me if you have any questions about use of sources or citations. It is far better to ask than to unintentionally plagiarize. Please refer to the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers as a citation style-guide. Please read the Academic Misconduct Code in full. It can be accessed at: <http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/AcademicMisconduct/tabid/248/Default.aspx>

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory and constitutes part of your grade. You may miss two class meetings without penalty. Your final grade will drop one-third of a letter grade for each subsequent absence. Missing four classes is grounds for failure. Exceptions to this policy may be made for those with adequate excuse and sufficient documentation. Please contact me to discuss. You are responsible for all assigned materials in the class and ensuring that your work is turned in on time.

**Participation:** This is a discussion-based seminar. Consequently, attendance alone is not adequate. You are expected to come to class prepared, having read the material and engaged critically with it. You should attend class ready to share your thoughts about the readings and discuss your portfolio assignments. I expect you to contribute meaningfully during each session.

**Title IX Policy and Reporting Responsibilities:** The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and gender-based stalking. Consequently, all UO employees are required to report to appropriate authorities (supervisor or Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity) when they have reasonable cause to believe that discrimination, harassment or abuse of any kind has taken, or is taking, place. Students seeking to discuss a situation without talking to a mandatory reporter may call 541-346-SAFE. This 24/7 hotline is staffed by confidential, trained counselors. For confidential help, students may also contact University Health Services (<http://healthcenter.uoregon.edu/>) or Sexual Assault Support Services (<http://sass-lane.org/>).

**Inclement Weather:** In the event of inclement weather, the UO home webpage (<http://www.uoregon.edu/>) will include a banner at the top of the page displaying information about delay, cancellation, or closure decisions for the Eugene campus. Additionally, the UO Alerts blog will be updated with the latest updates and bulletins.

Local television and radio stations will also broadcast delay and cancellation information. Classes will not be held if cancelled by the university. Additionally, members of the campus community are expected to use their best judgment in assessing the risk of coming to campus and returning home, based on individual circumstances. Those who believe the road conditions from home are dangerous are urged and even expected to stay there to prevent injury.

**Class Communication:** The primary means of communication outside of class in this course will be through your UO email account. Please check this account regularly. I am also most readily available through email. I will respond much more rapidly to email than to a telephone call. Generally, you can expect an email response from me within two working days.

**Classroom Electronic Communications Policies:** Cell phone use during class is prohibited. Tablets are permitted only to access the reading. Laptops are permitted only with express permission or during class activities requiring laptop use.

## Course Assessment

### Undergraduate

- Attendance and Participation, 10%
  - To receive an A, you should attend every class, arrive on time, bring a copy of the readings, and contribute thoughtfully to the discussion. Contributing thoughtfully means that you pose questions and provide answers that reflect your careful reading of the material, including directly referencing passages in the reading. In responding to your peers' observations, questions, and interpretations, you engage with the substance of their ideas and model respectful disagreement. In your questions, comments, and critiques, you show a willingness to take intellectual risks. You remain focused and fully engage with any work (including group work) assigned during class. Your contributions develop bridges between different class sessions, contributing to a conversation that spans the quarter.
- Portfolio: 40%
  - There will be 8 portfolio assignments during the course of the quarter. There will be around one portfolio assignment per week. Each portfolio entry will be worth 5% of your grade.
  - Each portfolio entry focuses a popular culture text you have found. This can be an advertisement, a television episode, a youtube video, a video game, an internet meme, a song, a popular book, a film, etc. Apply the readings from the course that day to the popular culture entry. You are expected to write 300-500 words. A rubric will be provided for the grading of these assignments.
- Final Research Project: 50%
  - In your final research project, you will apply what you have learned in class to a song, film, advertisement, television show, video game, or other popular culture text. Your final research project should apply at least 5 peer-reviewed works to your popular culture item. You may use readings from the class, but you are not required to rely only on course readings. A list of additional resources is provided at the end of the syllabus.
  - Early Draft: 5%
    - This typed double-spaced document should include either an image or link to the popular culture item on which you intend to write your final project. You should start the draft with a paragraph discussing the argument you might make. You should then discuss three assigned articles you intend to use in your final project. For each article, you should write a paragraph explaining how you might apply this article to your item. Thus, you are expected to have at

least four paragraphs in this early draft. It is due to the course management website prior to class on Tuesday, May 5<sup>th</sup>.

- Peer Workshop: 5%
  - If you are absent, insufficiently prepared, or fail to fully engage with your peers, you will not get credit for this opportunity.
- Presentation: 10%
  - This short presentation will be given during the last week of class or during the finals section for the class. Feedback from this presentation will help you craft your final paper. Your final presentation should include a sample of your popular culture item, identification of your argument, and examples of how you will be applying at least 3 of the articles to your item in building this argument.
- Final Paper (8-10 pages): 30%

## Graduate

- Attendance and Participation, 10%
  - To receive an A, you should attend every class, arrive on time, bring a copy of the readings, and contribute thoughtfully to the discussion. Contributing thoughtfully means that you pose questions and provide answers that reflect your careful reading of the material, including directly referencing passages in the reading. In responding to your peers' observations, questions, and interpretations, you engage with the substance of their ideas and model respectful disagreement. In your questions, comments, and critiques, you show a willingness to take intellectual risks. You remain focused and fully engage with any work (including group work) assigned during class. Your contributions develop bridges between different class sessions, contributing to a conversation that spans the quarter.
- Portfolio: 20%
  - You will complete 4 of the portfolio assignments listed for undergraduates in the syllabus.
- Class Presentation: 20%
  - You will select one day of class and run the course for that day. Depending on the number of graduate students in the class you may be paired with another student for this project. You must meet with me prior to class to discuss your plans.
- Final Research Project: 50%
  - In your final research project, you will apply what you have learned in class to a song, film, advertisement, television show, or other popular culture text.
  - Annotated Bibliography: 10%
    - Your annotated bibliography should contain eight sources from peer-reviewed journal articles or chapters from reputable academic books. Three of those sources may be from the class. This is due to the course website prior to class on Thursday, April 30<sup>th</sup>.
  - Early Draft, 5%
    - You should turn in a 3-5 page draft of your paper to the course website prior to class on Tuesday, May 5<sup>th</sup>.
  - Peer Discussion: 5%
    - If you are absent or not sufficiently prepared, you will not get credit for this opportunity.
  - Research Paper (8-10 pages): 30%

## Class Outline and Schedule

### **Week One** Introducing Environmental Cultural Studies

Tuesday, March 30: Introduction

Thursday, April 2: What is Popular Culture?

Marcel Danesi, "What is Popular Culture?" *Introductory Perspectives: What is Popular Culture?* Second Edition (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 1-34.

**Portfolio 1 Assignment:** Identify a contemporary example of popular culture. Apply the reading to the text to explain why it is an example of popular culture. You may also discuss any questions the reading raised for you.

### **Week Two** Nature and Wilderness

Tuesday, April 7: What is Nature?

Raymond Williams, "Nature," *Keywords* Revised Edition (New York: Oxford University, 1983), 219-224; Kate Soper, "The Discourses of Nature," *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Nonhuman* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995), 15-26.

**Portfolio 2 Assignment:** Identify a contemporary example of nature in popular culture. Apply the reading to the text to explain how the advertisement ideas about nature are depicted. Due to course website prior to class.

Thursday, April 9: Wilderness Narratives

William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 69-91; Louis Owens, "Burning the Shelter," *The Colors of Nature*, eds. Alison Hawthorne Deming and Laurot E. Savoy (Minneapolis: Milkweed, 2011), 211-214.

### **Week Three:** Gender, Nature, and Intersectionality

Tuesday, April 14: Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature

Mei Mei Evans. "Nature and Environmental Justice." *The Environmental Justice Reader*, eds. Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 181-193; Kate Soper. "Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature," *The Green Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 139-143.

Thursday, April 16: The Politics of the Natural

Noel Sturgeon, "The Politics of the Natural in U.S. History and Popular Culture," *Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of the Natural* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 17-49.

**Portfolio Entry 3:** Apply Sturgeon's argument to an advertisement.

### **Week Four:** Commoditized Nature

Tuesday, April 21: Buying and Selling Nature

Susan Davis, "Touch the Magic," *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 204-217; Jennifer Price, "Looking for Nature at the Mall: A Field Guide to the Nature Company," *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 186-203.

**Portfolio Entry 4:** Visit in person or explore the website of a business that fits with Davis's or Price's argument. This could include an REI, Rainforest Café, Whole Foods, or other restaurants, zoos, aquariums, or outdoor stores. Apply Price's and Davis's arguments to the location you visit virtually or in person.

Thursday, April 23: Prof. Wald @ the Association for Asian American Studies Conference. On-Line Class  
In lieu of class today, watch *Avatar* or *Pocahontas*. Write a 350-450 word response considering the relationship between identity and nature in the films. Consider at least two of the following: race, gender, class, sexuality, colonial status, or disability. For attendance credit today, post your response to the course management website before the start of class and write a substantive response to at least two of your classmates' posts prior to 5pm Sunday, April 26<sup>th</sup>.

### **Week Five: The Ecological Indian**

Tuesday, April 28: The Ecological Indian

David Ingram, "Ecological Indians and the Myth of Primal Purity." *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 45-55; Noel Sturgeon, "Frontiers of Nature: The Ecological Indian in U.S. Film," *Environmentalism in Popular Culture*, 53-79.

**Portfolio Entry 5:** Find an example of popular culture that employs the Ecological Indian or the myth of primal purity. Explain how this trope is at work in the piece and drawing on Sturgeon and Ingram explain what is problematic about the trope. You may not use *Avatar* or *Pocahontas*.

Thursday, April 30: The Ecological Indian and the Global South

Laura L. Sullivan, "You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman: The Political Economy of Contemporary Cosmetics Discourse," *The Nature of Cities*, eds. Michael Bennett and David W. Teague (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999), 213-230.

### **Week Six: Final Project Preparation**

Tuesday, May 5: Peer Workshop

To be prepared for your peer workshop, you need to bring at least three copies of your early outline to class.

**DUE:** Early draft due to course website prior to the start of class.

Thursday, May 7<sup>th</sup>: **No Class**

Instead of attending class, you are required to attend one session of the symposium Race and the Anthropocene taking place May 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>. Please find me at the event to sign up and verify your attendance. The conference schedule will be posted on the course management website.

### **Week Seven: Who Belongs in Nature?**

Tuesday, May 12: Representing People of Color in the Great Outdoors

Carolyn Finney, "Black Faces," *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 67-91; Derek Christopher Martin, "Apartheid in the Great Outdoors: American Advertising and the Reproduction of a Racialized Outdoor Leisure Identity," *Journal of Leisure Research* 36.4 (2004), 513-535

**Portfolio Entry 6:** Apply Martin's or Finney's argument to an advertisement or other popular culture text.

Thursday, May 14: Environmental Cultural Studies Perspectives on Disability

Elizabeth A. Wheeler, "Don't Climb Every Mountain," *ISLE* 20.3 (2013): 553-573; Sarah Jaquette Ray.

"Risking Bodies in the Wild: The Corporeal Unconscious of American Adventure Culture," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 33.3 (2009): 257-284.

### **Week Eight: Who is Natural to a Place?**

Tuesday, May 19: Immigration and Environmental Nativism

Sarah Jaquette Ray, "Endangering the Desert: Immigration, the Environment, and Security in the Arizona-Mexico Borderlands," *ISLE* 17.4 (2010): 709-734; David Pellow and Lisa Park, "Roots of Nativist Environmentalism in America's Eden," *American Studies, Ecocriticism, and Citizenship*, eds. Joni Adamson and Kimberly Ruffin (New York: Routledge, 2013), 175-189.

Thursday, May 21: Queer Environmental Justice

Heather MacDonald's *Ballot Measure 9* (1995); Katie Hogan, "Undoing Nature: Coalition Building as Queer Environmentalism," *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, ed. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 231-253.

**Portfolio Entry 7:** Respond thoughtfully to Hogan's reading of *Ballot Measure 9*. Bring in your own reading of the documentary.

### **Week Nine: Queering Ecology**

Tuesday, May 26: Gay Nature?

*March of the Penguins* (2005), Noel Sturgeon, "Penguin Family Values." *Environmentalism in Popular Culture*, 120-146; Myra Hird, "Naturally Queer," *Feminist Theory* 5.1 (2004), 85-89.

**Portfolio Entry 8:** Discuss the representation of sexuality in a popular culture text in the context of Sturgeon's chapter.

Thursday, May 28: Normative Environmentalisms

Noel Sturgeon, "'The Power is Yours Planetears': Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Children's Environmentalist Popular Culture," *Environmentalism in Popular Culture*, 103-119; Giovanna Di Chiro, "Polluted Politics? Confronting Toxic Discourse, Sex Panic, and Eco-Normativity," *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, ed. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 199-230.

### **Week Ten: Final Presentations**

Tuesday, June 2: Presentations

Thursday, June 4: Presentations

## Additional Reading Resources

- See also, <http://www.ecomediastudies.org/resources/bibliography/>

Karla Armbruster. "Creating the World We Must Save: The Paradox of Television Nature Documentaries." *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*. Ed. Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells. London: Zed Books, 1998. 218-238.

Derek Bousé. *Wildlife Films*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.

William Beinart and Katie McKeown. "Wildlife Media and Representations of Africa, 1950s to the 1970s." *Environmental History* 14.2 (2009): 429-452.

Cynthia Belmont. "Claiming Queer Space in/as Nature: An Ecofeminist Reading of *Secretary*." *ISLE*. 19.2 (Spring 2012): 317-335.

Pat Brereton. *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema*. Bristol: Intellect Books, 2005.

Colin Carman. "Grizzly Love: The Queer Ecology of Timothy Treadwell." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18 (2013): 507-528.

Deborah Carmichael, Editor. *The Landscape of Hollywood Westerns: Ecocriticism in the American Film Genre*. Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2006.

Alenda Y. Chang. "Back to the Virtual Farm: Gleaning the Agricultural-Management Game." *ISLE* 19.2 (Spring 2012): 237-252.

Joseph Clark. "Second Chances: Depictions of the Natural World in Second Life." *Creating Second Lives: Community, Identity, and Spatiality as Constructions of the Virtual*. Eds. Astrid Ensslin and Eben Muse. NY: Routledge, 2011.

Sean Cubitt. *Eco Media*. New York: Rodopi, 2005.

Kevin DeLuca. *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism*. NY: Guilford Press, 1999.

Finis Dunaway. *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Kelly Enright. *The Maximum of Wilderness: The Jungle in the American Imagination*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012.

Carolyn Finney. *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014.

Lee Gambin. *Massacred by Mother Nature: Exploring the Natural Horror Film*. Midnight Marquee, 2012.

Donna Haraway. *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

David Ingram. *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Juke Box in the Garden: Ecocriticism and American Popular Music Since 1960*. New York: Rodopi, 2010.

Adrian Ivakhiv. *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013.

Jennifer K. Ladino. "For the Love of Nature: Documenting Life, Death, and Animalty in *Grizzly Man* and *March of the Penguins*." *ISLE* 16:1 (Winter 2009): 53-90.

Stephanie LeMenager. *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*. Oxford: University Press, 2014.

Andrew Light. "Boyz in the Woods: Urban Wilderness in American Cinema." *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments*. Ed. Michael Bennett and David Teague. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999. 137-156.

- Mark Meister and Phyllis M. Japp, Editors. *Enviropop: Studies in Environmental Rhetoric and Popular Culture*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002.
- Greg Mittman. *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife in Film*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999.
- Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, eds. *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, and Desire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.
- Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann. *Ecology and Popular Film: Cinema on the Edge*. Albany: State University of New York: 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Film and Everyday Eco-disasters*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Gunfight at the Eco-coral: Western Cinema and the Environment*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *That's All Folks?: Ecocritical Readings of American Animated Features*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011.
- Anil Narine, Editor. *Eco-Trauma Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Mark Pedelty. *Ecomusicology: Rock, Folk, and the Environment*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012.
- Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt, eds. *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*. New York: Routledge/AFI, 2013.
- Stephen Rust and Carter Soles, ed. "Ecohorror: Special Issue" *ISLE* 21.3 (Summer 2014). Includes six peer-reviewed articles.
- Catriona Sandliands. "Desiring Nature, Queering Ethics: Adventures in Erotogenic Environments," *Environmental Ethics* 23: 169-188.
- Bron Taylor, ed. *Avatar and Nature Spirituality*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013.
- Ronald B. Tobias. *Film and the American Moral Vision of Nature: Theodore Roosevelt to Walt Disney*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011.
- Paul Wells. *The Animated Bestiary: Animals, Cartoons, and Culture*. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2009.
- David Whitley. *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2008.
- Alexander Wilson. *The Culture of Nature: Northern American Landscape from Disney to Exxon Valdez*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1992.
- Alice Wondrak Biel, *Do (Not) Feed the Bears: The Fitful History of Wildlife and Tourists in Yellowstone*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006.